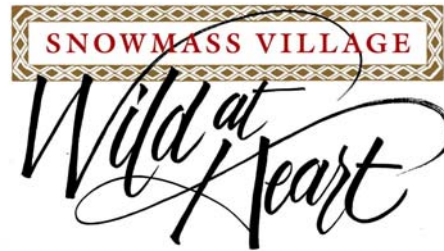


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*A Natural History Guide
Dedicated to Snowmass, Aspen
And the Maroon Bells Wilderness*

Q & A with author Janis Huggins

This book was born out of a remarkable collaboration between the Town of Snowmass Village and developers. How did this project come about?

Janis Huggins: I have always felt there was a need for a book like this as we are one of the premier mountain resort destinations in the world and no one else had written a natural history guide to our area. The Town of Snowmass' initial vision began in 1994 with the approved two new subdivisions: Two Creeks and The Pines. One of the conditions of the approval was that the developer, The Snowmass Land Company (SLC), provide funding for a book that would educate the homeowners about the wealth of wildlife and native plants within the subdivision. Seeing the opportunity to reach a much wider audience, town wildlife specialist Dawn Barton Keating and SLC president Jim Wells decided to produce a field guide that would be a resource for both residents and visitors of the Brush Creek watershed and similar habitats in the entire upper Roaring Fork Valley, including the surrounding wilderness areas.

They contracted with me in June of 2000 to write and produce the field guide. This was something new for all of us involved. My education and work experience as a botanist and naturalist were perfect for researching, deciding on the content and putting together the species lists, but I had not written anything of this scope before. We originally thought we could do the book in about 200 pages in 2 years but soon realized that just the groundwork itself would take that long. Eventually, the book evolved into something far more complete than we had originally anticipated -- and nearly 500 pages!



If we had not made the decision to extend the time frame, however, the book would have been interesting but not the great resource that it has turned out to be. It would have been just another book covering only a few species and leading to frustration in the field for readers. This is the problem with most of the field guides found in local bookstores: they cover such a wide area that it is impossible to really provide photos and information regarding a majority of species for such a defined area - e.g. Aspen and Snowmass.

Who will this book most appeal to?

Janis Huggins: I wrote the book using language I would use if leading a group that included people with a variety of interests -- from those who are just becoming curious about the natural world to those who already spend a lot of time working or recreating outdoors but have never had the time or the tools to take a closer look. The book is extremely user-friendly as well, with such features as the lay-flat binding, a red ribbon book mark, the plant color key, the plant family key, the illustrated glossary, a complete set of endnotes, metric system conversions in parentheses after every measurement, mammal track, and a ruler on the last page.

So, as the quote on the very first page indicates, I'm hoping to help anyone from novices to experienced outdoors people "see the landscape with new eyes" by delving into the natural histories of the wild species that live around us and getting to know them better.

You have called Snowmass Village: Wild at Heart a bridge between a technical key and a coffee table picture book. How does it fit both of these categories?

Janis Huggins:

A coffee table book is a book that provides beautiful photos for readers to enjoy but often leaves them wondering about the more intimate details on the subject covered. The more technical books or keys often are difficult to use, too dry, or don't provide enough interesting and exciting history and recent research information to satisfy the curious reader, whether that person is a novice or a professional.

In *Wild at Heart*, I wanted to provide beautiful photographs for each species as you might find in a coffee table book and yet also provide easily accessible identification information and natural history stories about each species. This makes the book much more interesting for visitors as well as for long-time residents. Most people do not have the time to learn to use a technical key to identify plants, nor will they carry around the number of books they would need to identify all of the plants, mammals and birds here -- or to understand our different plant communities and local geology. *Wild At Heart* brings all of these elements together into one compact, beautiful, easy-to-carry book.

How is the book different from other guides in the Rocky Mountains and why is it important to have such a book?

Janis Huggins: *Wild At Heart* is neither a huge, unwieldy book nor a simple, superficial work. It is very thorough and useful and a great size to carry in a daypack. There are not many field guides that tell people where to find so many species, how to identify them, and what the stories and recent research about each one are. To put wildlife and plants in one book -- as well as explain the ecology of elevations that are common to resort mountain towns in Colorado is practically unheard of.

Wild at Heart has just about everything a person would need to understand the natural history of Snowmass, Aspen and the surrounding wilderness areas. Most guides have a large distribution and tend to focus on a limited number of species from a large area such as the northern or southern Rockies, all of Colorado, or North America -- or they concentrate only on a single subject such as birds, plants, mammals, geology or ecology.

In the past, people have had to carry a virtual library in their pack to locate the wildlife and plant species they would find in this area. I really wanted readers to benefit from the 35-plus years I have spent exploring this region, and have fun learning some of the more intimate details that make each species so special. I also made a point of including a conservation update on how each species is faring. Although many plants at this elevation are doing fine (except in highly developed areas) there are some problems for certain species of birds and mammals. Many people are eager for this information, but they don't know where to look or how to find it.

So *Wild at Heart* is very different from other field guides on a number of levels, from the variety of detailed information it provides to its in-depth coverage of the Roaring Fork Valley to its broader usefulness in the Southern Rockies.

While Snowmass Village: Wild at Heart focuses primarily on the upper Roaring Fork Valley above 7,500 feet, how can it be used beyond the Aspen/Snowmass area as well and why is it such a useful tool for a much broader area?

Janis Huggins: Many areas in Colorado have similar habitats at these elevations, and therefore have similar species. As you travel around Colorado, you encounter areas that get a bit more or less moisture or have higher or lower average temperatures. Although this results in some different species -- such as Fitweed (*Coryopsis*), a wonderfully fragrant pink flowered plant common around Crested Butte, *Wild at Heart* still covers a tremendous number of Southern Rockies species found at similar elevations around Colorado.

What were some of the most spectacular moments or natural discoveries you made while researching this book?

Janis Huggins: Being up so early for several summers to photograph the plants was a highlight. Seeing the sun rise and spread such soft wonderful light on the meadows and forests, bringing everything to life, was incredible. I also think that spending so much time alone reinforced the importance of spending quiet time outdoors - even if with friends - to be able to encounter wildlife. And I also realized more than ever that it takes time to notice the details, such as the intricate inner parts of flowers, where the elk bedded down the night before, the rock that a bear turned over looking for insects, or how each bird's song sounds so different. There is immense pleasure in noting these kind of details, and they make the memories one collects so much more interesting and vivid. Many of the amazing facts I discovered while researching are highlighted in green boxes throughout the book - as well as heartfelt quotes from different writers that reflect the wonders of their experiences with nature.

What were some of the most remote and memorable spots you visited to research this book?

Janis Huggins: I spent a lot of time hiking and exploring East Snowmass Creek and the main Snowmass Creek valleys. Early spring at the top of East Snowmass Creek with the snowmelt waters cascading around me as I searched for brilliant yellow glacier lilies emerging from the edges of snow fields was pretty wonderful! I also spent a lot of time hiking above the Big Burn area in Snowmass and climbing around rocky cliffs on Independence Pass - which you can't beat for dramatic landscape! I have spent so much time guiding over the years, being alone in the mountains for such long periods of time gave me a greater appreciation than ever before how important preserving wild and open space really is. Our daily lives get so hectic that it is easy to forget how incredibly renewing and energizing being in the mountains with living things more wild than ourselves can be, whether we're on a trail close to town or in the numerous wilderness areas that surround us.

How did you come up with the title Snowmass Village: Wild at Heart?

Even though the subject matter covers a much broader area, the first part of the title, "Snowmass Village," pays tribute to the Town of Snowmass Village, which funded the book. "Wild at Heart" was chosen as a sort of double meaning referring both to the place and the people that come here. Colorado has seen tremendous changes over the last 40 years, and despite that change, despite the growth and development, there's still a lot of wildness and a remarkable range of vibrant ecosystems in this valley. When people come here to ski or visit, they may not know or appreciate it. This book helps them do that. Snowmass and Aspen can also be considered in the heart of the wild as they are surrounded by so many wilderness areas.